

Supporting Children's Writing

Time: 2 ½ - 3 hour workshop

Objectives

In this workshop participants will:

- Gain understanding in how children develop as writers.
- Identify strategies to promote writing throughout the day.
- Explore techniques and materials to encourage children's writing in centers.
- Learn that becoming a competent writer involves knowing and understanding the forms, function and features of writing.
- Understand how writing should be integrated throughout the day and within the environment.

Materials Required

- L3 Overheads or L3 PowerPoint
- Chart pad, markers, tape
- 5" x 8" Index cards
- Children's Book: *Click Clack, Moo: Cows that type*

Additional Materials

Chapter 5 in *Much more than the ABC's*. (1999). Schickedanz.

Chapter 3 & 4 in *Literacy through play*. (1999). Owocki.

Handout List

Agenda

Understanding Writing

Activity: Integrating Writing Experiences throughout the Day

Suggestions to Support Writing

Essential Messages

- Reading and writing develop together, not separately. Children who write become better readers.
- A writer needs a purpose to write.
- Children learn the uses of written language before they learn the forms.
- Children's writing develops through constant invention and reinvention of the forms of written language. To learn to write, children need to write.
- Children practice what they learn about writing, but such practice is most helpful when self initiated (Morrow, L.M. 2001. *Literacy development in the early years*).
- Being a competent writer involves knowing and understanding the forms, function and features of writing.
- Writing should be integrated throughout the day and within the environment.

Trainers' Agenda

1. Opening Activity: Acrostic Poem (10-15 minutes)

Distribute one 5" x 8" file card to each participant.

Say: "Holding the card vertically, write your first name in capital letters on the card vertically with each letter below the next." Pause to allow participants to complete. Then add, "Now think of a word or short phrase that begins with each letter of your name and describes you."

For example:

J	Joyful
O	Outspoken
R	Rational
D	Devilish
A	Animals
N	Natural beauty

Allow participants to assist one another. After 5 minutes, give a 2 minute warning to finish.

Invite participants to stand up and walk around the room, holding their file card in front of them like a sandwich board. Say, "Introduce yourself to people you don't know and read each other's poems."

After allowing a few minutes for participants to share each others poems, call them back to their seats. Ask if anyone knows the name of the type of poem they just wrote. If no one responds, share that it is an acrostic poem. Ask if anyone has written acrostic poems with their children? Share that it is one way to support children's writing as well as to point out letter-sound correspondence. Lead into agenda.

2. Welcome and Logistics (5 minutes)

Use Handout "Agenda" to review agenda and session objectives.

3. Introduce Topic: Supporting Children's Writing (30 minutes)

Open the session using L3 Overhead 1 or PowerPoint slide 2.

Invite a volunteer to read the quote aloud.

Children want to write. They want to write the first day of school. This is no accident. Before they went to school they marked up walls, pavements, newspapers with crayons, chalk, pens or pencils... anything that makes a mark. The child's marks say, "I am."

Daniel Graves, *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*

Ask participants to reflect on and discuss the quote at their tables. List the ways they see their children coming to school as writers. How do they write?

Allow 5-7 minutes for table talk.

Invite participants to share the ways their children write. Chart their responses.

Say: "You've described many of the ways children write. Researchers have noted many varied descriptions of the development of writing. Most agree, though, that if there are stages, they aren't well defined or necessarily sequential."

Add: "Children learn in a social and cultural context. Let's think about the acquisition of language. Babies understand the power of speech because of the reinforcement they receive from adults. They are surrounded by adults who use language and expect children to do so. They want to be able to participate in the social world around them.

The acquisition of oral language is non-sequenced. We would never think of dissecting oral language by having children learn all the s words before the t words.

Young children are written language users and learners long before they receive formal instruction. Children begin to learn written language in the same way they learn to speak. They see adults writing for real purposes.

It's interesting because when we think about reading we always talk about environmental print—how children can read the McDonald's signs—there is no reason to assume that at the same time they aren't paying attention to writing."

Say: "Let's look at the categories of children's writing."

Show L2 Overhead 2 or PowerPoint slide 3 and annotate. Relate the participants sharing of children's writing noted on the chart paper to the varying categories.

Trainer's Note: You may want to make overheads of some examples of various categories of writing from the samples provided of children's work samples and literacy prompts.

Categories & Stages of Children's Writing *

- **Marks & Scribbling** Young children as early as 18-24 months can begin to experiment with making marks and scribbling as they begin to explore what happens as they move a crayon on a paper. From random marks, some scribbles are organized and begin looking like pictures; others look more like writing.
- **Drawing** Some children use drawing to stand for writing. One researcher of children's writing in kindergarten noted children seem to be working out the relationship between drawing and writing and not confusing the two. They see their drawing as a vehicle for communication.
- **Scribble Writing** This is scribbling intended as writing. Some children's work will have a picture and then make intentional wavy lines to stand for words. Children in dramatic play can be seen using scribble writing as they hand the teacher a message or take a restaurant order on a pad.

- **Letterlike Forms & Individual Letters** These mock letters often look like letters. Individual letters also appear. The initial letter of a child's name is often the first letter she is able to make (Schickedanz, 1999).
- **Letter Strings** These are often sequences of letters from their name or other letters they know. They may be written out of order, or letters repeated more than once. (e.g. Mary may write MMAAYAMM)
- **Invented Spelling** Basically, children create their own spellings for words. Sometimes one letter may stand for an entire syllable or words are not properly spaced. Vowels may be omitted. As their writing matures, they look more like conventional spelling with a letter omitted (e.g. LIK = Like)
- **Conventional Forms** The child's writing resembles standard writing. Spelling errors may appear, but as errors not because of invented spelling.

Even after a child is able to produce standard writing, they often still will use mock letters or scribble writing for various purposes. (e.g. making a shopping list).

(* Morrow, L.M. (2001). *Literacy development in the early year*. Schickedanz, J.A. (1999). *Much more than ABC's*)

4. Activity: Constructing Knowledge about Writing (30 minutes)

Begin this activity by using L3 Overhead 3 or PowerPoint slide 4.

Ask for a volunteer to read the screen.

Piaget explains that children are curious about the world, and acting on it is how they come to know and understand. Just as they learn about oral language by exploring through listening and talking, children learn about writing by exploring through observing and writing. Child *act on* written language, discovering its forms, functions and features. As with all objects of knowledge, experience proceeds meaning. The more hands-on experiences children have with written language, the more opportunities they will have to make meaning of writing and reading.

Divide participants into small groups of 5-6 and distribute chart paper and markers to each group. Ask each group to select a recorder and a reporter. Assign each group to discuss one of 2 aspects of the forms and functions of written language as follows:

1. What are some of the forms and functions of writing? List some of the purposes for writing. (Why do you write?)
2. What strategies can teachers use to encourage exploration of the various forms and functions of writing? List some of the ways teachers support writing.

Trainer's Note: Assign half of the small groups to the each question. If you need a refresher in the forms and functions of print, refer to Owocki's book, Literacy through Play found in the Trainer's Resource Box.

Allow 10-15 minutes for group discussion.

Invite the groups who discussed the purposes of writing to report to the whole group. Examples of purposes may include writing: a letter, grocery lists, a story, a check, a telephone message, a thank you note, etc.

Invite the groups who discussed strategies to report to the whole group. Strategies may include: providing various materials, modeling writing, sharing writing, scaffolding, environmental print, etc.

Make links between the two sets of responses.

5. Discussion: Features of Writing (15 minutes)

Use L3 Overhead 4 or PowerPoint slide 5 and annotate. Link comments to the forms and functions, and strategies noted by small groups.

SIGNIFICANT FEATURES OF WRITTEN LANGUAGE *

- **Print carries meaning.** One of their earliest discoveries. They learn that print must be present for a teacher to read a story (e.g. difference between picture book and story book) Children ask, "What does that say?"
- **Print is a close representation of objects.** Children initially think that print only labels objects; early on, children expect print to only name what is in the picture; 5 lines of print still say only one word.
- **Written messages must correspond with oral language.** Children start to learn that the oral language must match written messages. Children will take four lines of their print/scribbles and make them match what it is they say.
- **Written symbols have conditions that make them interpretable.** Children begin to hypothesize that there is a difference between pretend and real writing.
- **Letters and words are written in linear fashion.** Children learn that reading & writing is left to right and top to bottom.
- **Written language is predictable.** Children begin to make predictions about the meaning of print. They making an educated guess; they begin to use cues from situational context and/or pictures to make a guess.
- **There is a relationship between letter patterns and sound patterns.** Children's move to conventional writing begins with one letter = a syllable, as well as beginning to identify/write initial consonants.
- **Words have boundaries.** Children learn that there is a space between words.

* Owocki, G. (1999). *Literacy through play*.

6. Activity: Integrating writing throughout the day (30 minutes)

Recap: "During this session, we've looked at the broad categories and stages children use in emergent writing, and what knowledge children need to develop about the forms, functions and

features of writing. We've shared some ideas and strategies for supporting writing through the environment and through our actions. Now we are going to focus on the daily routine and how to integrate writing throughout the day."

Distribute L3 Handout "Integrating Writing Experiences Throughout the Day."

Ask participants to form triads and brainstorm various ways children can have experiences with writing during each segment of the day.

Allow 10-15 minutes for triads to work, and then ask triads to join with another triad they don't work with or know well to present their ideas.

Allow 5-10 minutes for triads to share with each other, and then bring the whole group back together.

Go through each segment of the day and invite participants to share. Solicit 3 – 5 ways to integrate writing for each segment. As participants share ideas, comment on its relation to children learning about the forms, functions or features of print.

Trainer's Note: Comment on using Morning Messages. Ask how many do this? Invite a few to share what they do. Note that with 3's & 4's it is particularly important to keep message short (1 to 2 sentences) and to include rebus symbols in their writing.

Ask for questions, insights and new ideas.

7. Discussion (10 – 15 minutes)

Use L3 Overhead 5 & 6 or PowerPoint slides 6 - 8 to recap and share additional strategies.

Distribute L3 Handout Suggestions to Support Writing to participants

SUGGESTIONS TO SUPPORT WRITING

- **Provide a variety of useful writing and drawing materials in all centers** Materials should be aligned with the center (e.g. graph paper, post-its, and materials for signage in blocks)
- **Anticipate various emergent forms of writing**
- **Encourage children to write their own way**
- **Invite children to write or dictate a story**
- **Encourage children to write to one another**
- **Accept children's additions to your writing**
- **Display and send home samples of children's writings**
- **Listen to children "read" their writing**
- **Make encouraging and specific comments** Make explicit the strategies you see children use (e.g. "I see you left a space between the words.")
- **Model the usefulness of writing** Children need to see you writing for various purposes (e.g. writing a note to the teacher across the hall, writing a phone message, using a post-it to remember something)

- **Make explicit your strategies while writing** Talk through your writing pointing out a specific strategy (e.g. when writing Tom's name on his paper, "To make a T, I make a straight line down and then one more line across at the top.")
- **Notice environmental print** Ask children questions such as "what do you think it says"
- **Encourage children to write**
- **Provide opportunities and materials for book making**
- **Relate meaningful writing experiences to projects/themes**
- **Create a writing center and vary materials** It is important to keep the center interesting by adding new materials to it regularly.
- **Carefully observe children's writing. Knowing where children are in their thinking enables you to support them based on their current levels of development.** Link to observing and documenting and Age by Age Accomplishments.

8. Closure (10 minutes)

At the bottom of the L3 Handout Suggestions to Support Writing, ask participants to add 2 or 3 new ideas they heard today to the bottom by the arrows.

Ask: "As a result of today's workshop, what is one idea you are really excited to try in your classroom?"

Hear a few "excited abouts."

Read the children's book: *Click Clack, Moo: Cows that type*. Comment that just like the cows, children need to have a purpose and the materials to write.